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Oceans and the law of the sea

Letter dated 7 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to advise that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/231 of 24 December 2011, a workshop for the South-West Pacific region was held from 25 to 27 February 2013 in Brisbane, Australia, under the auspices of the United Nations, in support of the first phase of the first assessment cycle of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects. I have the honour to transmit to you the report of the workshop (see annex).

I kindly request that the present note and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 75.

(*Signed*) Gary **Quinlan**

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Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 7 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report of the sixth workshop held under the auspices of the United Nations in support of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

Brisbane, Australia, 25-27 February 2013

I. Overview

1. The present report focuses on critical information for the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, and the Group of Experts as they develop the South-West Pacific region component of the first global integrated marine assessment (hereafter referred to as the world ocean assessment). It highlights the findings of the workshop in relation to the South-West Pacific region — in particular, information gaps, capacity needs for marine assessments in the region, suggestions for development of the world ocean assessment, and the next steps to be taken in the production of the assessment. These insights are synthesized from the various presentations and breakout group discussions, as well as the concluding session of the workshop. The annexes to the report provide other details of the workshop and its outcomes, including the agenda, list of participants, summaries of the presentations and an analysis of existing marine assessments in the South-West Pacific region, including breakout group results.[1]

II. Background: objectives, history and participants

2. Following the recommendations made at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process in June 2011 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/231 of 24 December 2011, the workshop for the South-West Pacific region was held from 25 to 27 February 2013 in Brisbane, Australia, under the auspices of the United Nations in support of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects.

3. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Enhance dialogue between marine experts within Governments, intergovernmental organizations and regional initiatives
- Develop an inventory of environmental and socioeconomic marine assessments
- Consider the linkages among assessments, including driving factors and the state of the marine environment

[1] All annexes to the report are available from the workshop website (www.environment.gov.au/coasts/international/regularprocess/) and Regular Process website (www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/global_reporting.htm).

- Identify marine assessment capacity-building needs and consider means to address those needs.

4. The Australian Government hosted the workshop with the technical and financial support of the Marine Biodiversity Hub of the National Environmental Research Program; the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization; the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme; the Australian Agency for International Development; the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations Secretariat; the United Nations Environment Programme; the Government of France; the Government of New Zealand; the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; the Secretariat of the Pacific Community; the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency; and Conservation International.

5. The workshop was facilitated by its Co-Chairs, Tuiloma Neroni Slade (Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Pacific Ocean Commissioner) and Peter Harris (member of the Group of Experts established pursuant to paragraph 209 of General Assembly resolution 65/37 A). Travis Bover (Australian Government) co-chaired the third day of proceedings in the absence of Mr. Slade. Participants included experts from 10 countries in the South-West Pacific region, experts from countries outside the region, many local, regional and international organizations, and one member of the Group of Experts.[2]

III. Conduct of the workshop

6. The workshop was conducted in accordance with its agenda.[3]

7. A series of presentations to explain the world ocean assessment and to set the context of its South-West Pacific region component was provided on the first day.

8. The second day was dedicated to the breakout groups, in which participants self-selected into four groups, in line with the four major sections of the world ocean assessment: biophysical (part III, chaps. 4-7); food security and food safety (part IV, chaps. 10-15); socioeconomics (part III, chaps. 3 and 8, and part V, chaps. 17-30); and marine biological diversity (part VI, chaps. 34-43). The breakout groups were conducted according to the guidance developed to ensure comparable outcomes that reflected the objectives of the workshop.

9. Presentations containing highlights of the discussions of the breakout groups were provided on the third day. Following these presentations, the Co-Chair, Peter Harris, provided a recap of the means by which the participants should engage further in the conduct of the world ocean assessment, drew attention to the workshop's key achievements and declared the workshop closed.

[2] The list of participants is available at www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/australia_2013/Participant_List.pdf.

[3] Available at www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/australia_2013/Workshop_Agenda.pdf.

IV. South-West Pacific region information gaps

10. Prior to the workshop, an inventory of key sources of information for the world ocean assessment was produced. Using this as a starting point, a number of gaps were identified throughout the presentations and discussions, by the breakout groups and in the closing discussion, including the following:

- Effects of river discharges on the marine environment, including both freshwater volume and nutrient inputs
- Socioeconomic impacts of freshwater fluxes, sea-level rise, the effects of El Niño, and changes in ocean circulation
- Ocean chemistry observations (pCO2, nutrients)
- Meteorological phenomena
- Ocean acidification
- Cumulative effects of multiple stresses on the marine environment
- Large-scale data on primary production, cycling of nutrients, surface layer and plankton
- Functioning of open-ocean ecosystems
- Finer scale information on biological processes/ecosystems in coastal areas
- Socioeconomic implications of primary production trends and other factors affecting food webs
- Understanding of the impacts of multiple stresses on carbonate production rates
- Carbonate production, particularly in regard to the longevity of islands
- Data on artisanal and coastal fisheries
- Data on recreational fisheries
- Impacts of large-scale fisheries on the ecosystem
- Understanding and quantification of ecosystem services in the region
- Understanding of traditional knowledge and cultural uses of oceans in the region
- Region-specific information on shipping and ports (despite it being an important issue for the region that is likely to increase in importance in the future)
- Gas hydrates (considered to be a possible emerging issue for the region)
- Ocean thermal energy conservation (viewed as a possible emerging issue)
- Resilience to changing impacts: terrestrial, over-fishing, climate change, national disaster
- Seagrass distribution and trends
- Data on non-commercial fish species

- Animals in the coastal environment: status, trend and threat data, and marine mammal information
- Sharks: status and trends
- Nature and condition of biodiversity in high seas areas

11. An analysis of existing marine assessments[4] provided details of information sources and gaps for each chapter of the world ocean assessment, along with other information intended to be of use in the preparation of the assessment as it relates to the South-West Pacific region. The analysis contains a record of the inputs to and discussions at the workshop, as well as the preliminary inventory completed prior to the workshop.

V. Capacity needs for marine assessments in the South-West Pacific region

12. Drawing on the presentations and plenary and breakout group discussions, participants made the following observations regarding capacity needs and the measures to address those needs for the South-West Pacific region:

- The production of global marine assessments should be linked to ongoing efforts to support regional (led by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme) and national state-of-the-environment reporting and streamlining of reporting arrangements (led by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat/Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme). By providing capacity development and other support to these initiatives, the region will be better placed to contribute to and benefit from the Regular Process.
- The production of global marine assessments should be done in a way that provides mentoring and learning opportunities for less experienced scientists and practitioners.
- There is a need to actively facilitate the involvement of practitioners from Pacific island countries and territories in the production of global marine assessments, including improved communication efforts to ensure awareness of the opportunity to be involved, assistance in registering for the Pool of Experts and resourcing support for and formal recognition of work done.
- A great deal of data and information exists but it is often not readily identifiable or accessible. Enhanced regional and national capacities to store, access, share and interrogate data and information would assist the production of global marine assessments and facilitate the meeting of regional and national objectives.
- Resourcing is a substantial constraint on the capacity of the region to contribute to the production of global marine assessments. This can in part be addressed by the nature, scope and process for the development of assessments that more deliberately support national and regional objectives, as well as the objective of producing a global report. For example, the global marine

[4] Available at www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/australia_2013/Analysis_assessments.pdf.

assessment could provide region-specific information and access to the underpinning data and information.

- Because of the limited capacity of the region to engage in the drafting of the world ocean assessment, the review stage might be an efficient point for the region to ensure that regional information and perspectives are appropriately reflected in the assessment. A second workshop or network among involved practitioners may provide mechanisms for doing this. Similarly, providing support to an appropriate Pacific regional organization to facilitate and coordinate ongoing regional engagement may be useful.

VI. Suggestions for the development of the world ocean assessment

13. Throughout the workshop, a continual theme of discussion was on how to ensure that the value of the world ocean assessment was maximized, not only on a global scale, but also at the regional and national levels. Key observations made in this context included:

- The world ocean assessment needs to provide information in an accessible and usable way. Consideration should be given to the creation of more concise and policy-focused communication products, the presentation of regionally disaggregated analysis, and mechanisms for facilitating access to the underpinning data and information.
- Global assessment and reporting through the world ocean assessment should seek to link with and support regional and national assessment and reporting processes. This would enhance efficiency, quality and outcomes at all levels and garner Pacific island country buy-in to the Regular Process.
- The process of developing global marine assessments should be designed to maximize opportunities for capacity development, for example, by facilitating mentoring relationships and partnerships, and by reinforcing and building on existing national and regional efforts.
- An important function of the first world ocean assessment will be to identify and prioritize gaps in knowledge. Prioritization will require policy decisions to be made once gaps in knowledge have been identified.
- A great deal of assessment and reporting involves the repeated synthesis of existing assessments and not the generation of new data. The world ocean assessment can highlight this issue and identify potential priority areas for the generation of new data.
- An important role for the world ocean assessment is to reinforce the importance of oceans to the global sustainable development agenda and the unique role of small island developing States in managing large areas of the world's oceans. This aspect is of particular relevance to the South-West Pacific region.
- Consideration of trends and the future outlook for the oceans, as well as assessment of their current state, would significantly enhance the value of global marine assessment reports.

VII. Next steps in the production of the world ocean assessment

14. The results of the workshop will be shared with the Group of Experts to inform the drafting of the South-West Pacific region component of the world ocean assessment. The assessment timeline includes the following key steps:

- Further nominations by States to the Pool of Experts
- Preparation of working papers for each chapter
- Preparation of draft chapters based on working papers (October 2013-March 2014)
- Production of the first draft of the first world ocean assessment (April-May 2014)
- Peer review and review process (June-August 2014)
- Final draft (September 2014)
- Submission to the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process (December 2014)
- Publication (February 2015).

15. Participants were asked to send any additional sources of information and names of experts to Travis Bover (regularprocessSWPAC@environment.gov.au) for inclusion in the present report. Participants were also encouraged to join the Pool of Experts and, if selected by the Group of Experts, to engage in drafting the South-West Pacific region component of the world ocean assessment.